

Governors Island, Fort Columbus (Fort Jay)
Building #210
Governors Island
New York Harbor
New York City
New York County
New York

HABS No. NY-5715-1C

HABS
NY
31-Gov,
16-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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(Page 1)

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

GOVERNORS ISLAND, FORT COLUMBUS (FORT JAY)
BUILDING 210

HABS NO. NY-5715-1C

For background information, see documentation HABS No. NY-4-6 on Fort Columbus (Fort Jay).

Location: Fort Jay, west side of quadrangle, Governors Island, New York Harbor, New York, New York.

Present Owner: United States Coast Guard

Present Occupants: 210A Lieutenant Commander and Mrs. R.M. Acker
210B Lieutenant Commander and Mrs. M.L. Lavache
210C Commander and Mrs. V.A. Palmieri
210D Lieutenant Commander and Mrs. T. White

Present Use: Officers' Family Housing

Significance: Since its construction in the 1830s the building has served an essential function. It is one of a set of four nearly identical buildings within Fort Jay that have been in continuous use as quarters for troops and officers garrisoned on the Island. Despite alterations over nearly a century and a half, this two-story brick building with monumental two-story portico essentially retains its original architectural character.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Work on new barracks buildings to replace old ones within the fort was begun at least by 1834. The Engineering Department reported in that year that the masonry of the buildings on the south, west and north sides of the parade was nearly complete and the roofs ready to receive their covering. Work had also begun on the east barracks (American State Papers, vol. 5, p. 386). Work obviously proceeded slowly as an inspection report from September 1836 noted that the quarters were not yet ready for occupancy (Sheras to Cross, September 24, 1836). Two months later the Engineer Department reported the following: "The necessary plastering and painting will be finished this month, as well as the iron work and roofing of the barracks, at which time it is also expected the carpentry will be completed" (Ibid, vol. 6, p. 847). Triangular buildings were placed at the corners of each of the four barracks by 1839 and used at that time as privies and offices.
2. Architect: The building was probably designed by either the Engineering or Quartermaster Department on the Island.

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3. Original and subsequent owners: The United States Army was the original owner. Ownership was transferred to the United States Coast Guard in 1966.
4. Builder: Construction work was probably done by the Army under the direction of Captain J. L. Smith of the Engineering Department who was supervising construction work on the Island at the time the building was erected.
5. Original plans and construction: Plate 1, an 1839 elevation and floor plan of the barracks buildings and officers' quarters within Fort Columbus, is the earliest drawing discovered. The drawing is in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives, Record Group 77, Fortifications File, Drawer 37, Sheet 23. The drawing also illustrates the small triangular buildings placed at each end of the larger buildings at some time during the 1830s.
6. Alterations and additions: Soon after construction, the plan of the buildings was found to be unsatisfactory. A Board of Officers appointed to examine the conditions of the barracks and quarters on the Island reported in 1839 that the buildings did "not seem to be well adapted to the purposes for which they were designed." According to the Board, the rooms were too small and poorly ventilated, and inappropriately placed windows subjected the men to sudden changes of weather. Space allotted for colonnades on the front of the buildings could have been more wisely used to enlarge the rooms. The Board also felt that expanding the parade ground by placing the buildings next to the terreplein wall was unwise, since it allowed no space for exits at the rear of the buildings. Actually, removal of the barracks from their earlier position had not added sufficiently to the open space within the fort, and its use as a parade ground remained limited. To alleviate some of these problems, plans for making the interiors more functional were proposed by Colonel James Bankhead in 1844 (Plate 2). Iron balconies accessible by exterior stairs were to be placed on the second story of all four buildings, and windows at the ends and center were to be converted to doors opening onto the balconies. Interior stairways could then be removed and the rooms enlarged in the enlisted barracks. The floor plan in the officers' quarters was to remain the same.

The proposed changes were apparently not made in the mid-1840s since another set of alterations to the buildings was proposed in 1855. Plates 3 and 4 illustrating proposed changes in the floor plan and exterior stairways which differed little from the earlier proposals was submitted to the Chief of Engineers.

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These drawings illustrate a further alteration not recommended in the earlier plans. The flat roof was to become a hipped roof. The suggestion to raise the roof had been made at least five years earlier since the interiors had been repeatedly damaged by leaks (Whiting to Jesup, January 28, 1850). The alterations were presumably made at the time although this could not be documented. Although second story balconies had been placed on the enlisted barracks by 1863 (Inspection Report, October 31, 1863), the plan to remove interior stairways and provide access to the second floor by exterior stairs and a balcony on the officers' quarters was not carried out. A detailed description of the four buildings made in 1868 by the Surgeon General's Office specified that only the enlisted barracks had balconies across the second floor. The report also noted that unlike the enlisted barracks, the officers' quarters had interior halls containing stairways.

In 1880 the triangular structure at the corners of Building #210 were incorporated into the larger building and a second story added at the same time (Cartographic and Architectural Branch, National Archives, Fort Jay, Governors Island, New York File, Drawer 37).

In 1920-21 when all four buildings within the fort became officers' housing, the floor plan of at least one of the buildings, #202, was altered to form two apartments on each floor. Presumably, the same was done with Building #210 although this was not documented. (See HABS drawings, sheets 2-4, copies of which are included with the photographs following the Fort Jay data.)

At some point, the terreplein was cut away from behind the parapet so that it sloped down to the basement floor level allowing windows to be cut through the old retaining wall. By 1934, this wall formed the rear wall of the basement (HABS, 1934, p. 6). This may have been done during the 1920-21 conversion to make quarters in the basement more livable.

In 1936-38 the interior was altered once again. The plan was changed to four two-story units above basement maid and utility rooms. The plan changes necessitated alterations to the building's fenestration pattern as well. Architectural drawings documenting these alterations are on file in the Coast Guard Facilities Engineering Division on Governors Island (copies are contained in the photographs following the Bibliography). Double brick garages were built in the bastions at the same time. (See HABS No. NY-5715-1C-5 through NY-5715-1C-7.)

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- B. Historical Context: Buildings to garrison the troops on Governors Island were an important element of the Fort Columbus complex from the beginning. The fort, initially constructed in the 1790s, contained three such buildings. The three survived the demolition of Fort Jay in 1805 and were joined shortly by two additional buildings. These are shown on Plates 5 and 6 a cross-section of the Island drawn in 1813. By 1827, the barracks buildings within the fort were in a bad state of decay with leaking roofs and deteriorated woodwork, masonry and plaster (Stanton to Jesup, March 18, 1827). Five years later, the Chief of Engineers reported that the entire removal of floors, ceilings and roofs was necessary and that the building shells were not worth saving. He recommended that the barracks be removed to a situation within the fort that would enlarge the parade ground (American State Papers, vol. 5, p. 42). Construction of new barracks within the fort began at least by 1834 and was completed several years later.

Once constructed, Building #210 was occupied by officers. Eight sets of two rooms each provided accommodations for eight captains or 12 subalterns. A kitchen for each quarters was located in the basement.

Building #210 continued to be occupied by officers at least through the end of the 1870s, but its use over the next 30 years is less certain (Map of Governors island, 1879, Record Group 77, Miscellaneous Forts File, Series A, #13). By 1908 the buildings appears to have been used as enlisted barracks. A 1908 map lists all four buildings within the fort as barracks. These may have housed enlisted troops since earlier documents specified between enlisted barracks and officers' quarters. At any rate, Building #210 once again housed officers by 1920-21 (HABS, 1934, p. 4). In March of 1934, it was occupied by four officers and their families (Ibid). In the same year, plans were made to remodel the interiors of all four buildings giving them a completely new floor plan. Work began on Building #202 in 1934 and was completed on the other three between 1936 and 1938 as part of the extensive work done on the Island by the Works Progress Administration. Building #210 remains as officers' quarters housing four families.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The building is one of four nearly identical Greek Revival styled structures originally used as quarters for troops and officers housed on the Island. The four form a unified group with impressive porticoes featuring two-story masonry columns along the facades facing onto the quadrangle. Although altered several times by the incorporation

of the small triangular buildings on the north and south sides and by changes in the roof line, the building essentially retains its architectural character on the exterior. The interior however has been entirely altered from the original and exhibits details typical of the 1930s period.

2. Condition of Fabric: The building is well maintained and is in good condition throughout.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: The building is rectangular with acute angles on the northwest and southwest corners made by the incorporation of two small triangular structures into the larger building. The two-story above raised basement building has 13 bays on the east or front side and measures 215' 3" x 22'. The basement is above grade on the west side where the terreplein wall has been cut away.
2. Foundation: The foundation is stone approximately 1' 9" thick the west, north and south sides and 3' 1" on the west side.
3. Walls: Basement walls are random red sandstone and granite ashlar on the east, north and south sides. The basement wall on the west or back side is parged and extends approximately 1' 9" beyond the wall above. The fabric underneath is probably stone with a brick facing. First and second story walls are red brick laid in Flemish bond with queen closers at the corners. Areas laid in 5-1 and 6-1 common bond are the result of enlargement of the building with the incorporation of small triangular structures on the north and south. These areas are on the north and south ends of the west wall, the south wall, the north and south ends of the east wall and the north wall. The change in fenestration pattern on the west wall is clearly evident with newer brick work and mortar joints. The walls show evidence of sandblasting.
4. Structural system: Exterior walls are masonry load-bearing 1' 4" thick on the first floor and 8" to 1' on the second. On the interior, partition walls are 4". Floor joists are 3" x 10", 16" on center.
5. Porches, balconies: The major feature of the east portico is the 12 fluted masonry Doric columns set on coursed granite and red sandstone ashlar bases. The columns rise two stories to support a wooden entablature and hipped roof. The wrought iron balustrade is made of a narrow rail with diagonal and vertical balusters. Plates bearing military emblems are placed at the

points where the vertical members cross. The porch deck has recently been renewed with tongue and groove planks. Steps leading to the porch in the third, fifth, ninth and eleventh bays have stone treads and brick risers. Under the porch, the interstices between the piers are red brick laid in a basketwork pattern. Under the porch, the interstices between the piers are red brick laid in basketwork pattern. A second story balcony with an identical balustrade supported by metal brackets attached to the wall and columns extends the full length of the facade. The floor of the balcony is tongue and groove planks.

Two wrought iron balconies supported by iron posts are at the first floor level on the west side. These are above the areaway between the west wall of the building and the retaining wall of the terreplein. The wrought iron balustrades are identical to those on the east portico.

6. Chimneys: Four interior brick chimneys are set to the west of the ridge.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: On the east side, doors are located in the second, fourth, tenth and twelfth bays in the first and second stories. Doors are wooden paneled and have three light transoms. Each unit has a single wood and glass door on the first floor of the west side. The building is bisected on the basement and first floor by a large semielliptical postern in the center bay. The postern is continuous with the west sallyport of the fort.
 - b. Windows: Windows are typically six-over-six-light double hung sash with brick jack arches and stone or precast stone lug sills.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The hipped roofs of both the building and the porch are covered with asphalt shingles.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: The boxed eaves which appear to be wooden, contain the gutters and partially obscure a corbelled brick cornice.

B. Description of Interior:

The building is divided into four quarters each two stories above the basement. Since floor plans and interior finishes are similar, only one unit, Quarters 210C, was examined.

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1. Floor plan:

- a. Basement: The basement is entered from the first floor by a straight run stairway facing north along the east wall. A stair hall runs north-south along the east wall. At the south end of the hall is a storage room. Proceeding north along the west side of the hall is a maid's room and bathroom and a laundry room shared with Quarters #210D. The hall is terminated on the north by a closet.
- b. First Floor: On the first floor, the entrance opens onto a hall with the stairs to the left and a closet on the right. A hall runs north-south parallel to the stairway. A rectangular living room with fireplace, the dining room and kitchen are on the west wall. These three rooms are interconnected by doors between each and each opens onto the hall.
- c. Second Floor: On the second floor, the stairway and hall are along the east wall. Three bedrooms opening off the hall are in a line along the west wall. Bathrooms are at the north and south ends of the hall.

2. Stairways: The main stairway leading to the second floor is a straight-run stair with 16 risers. The square panelled newel post, railing and treads are darkly stained wood. Square balusters, risers and stringer have been painted. On the second floor, the balustrade encloses the stairwell along the west and north sides.

A closed staircase entered through a door under the main staircase leads to the basement. The square newel post, risers, treads and rail are painted wood.

3. Flooring: Floors on the first and second floors are varnished wood boards about 2 1/4" wide. The kitchen floor is linoleum. Bathroom floors are hexagonal tile. Basement floors are wood, concrete or carpeted.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings are plaster. Living and dining room ceilings are covered with pronounced, curved plaster molding on the ceiling. Bathrooms have a ceramic tile wainscoting.
5. Openings:
- a. Doorways and doors: Doors are wood typically panelled with beaded wooden surrounds.

- b. Windows: Windows are typically recessed with deep wooden sills and beaded wooden surrounds.
- 6. Decorative features: The only fireplace in 210C is on the north wall of the living room. Painted fluted pilasters flank the opening and support the wooden mantel. The brick facing is unpainted, and the hearth is red quarry tile.

Arched telephone niches with wooden shelves are located in the first and second floor stairhalls. Metal plates below the niches obscure the telephone wiring.

A built-in wooden and glass dresser is located on the east wall of the kitchen to the south of the hallway door. The dresser consists of an upper section of three six-paned glass doors supported by scrolled brackets. The lower portion has three drawers above and three doors.

- 7. Hardware: Door hardware is typically plain brass plates and knobs. Doors to the exterior have more elaborate brass plates and knobs.
- 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning: Heating is by steam with radiators in each room. These are typically placed in recesses below the windows and are generally obscured by metal covers. Cooling is achieved by window air conditioners.

D. Site:

- 1. General Setting: The building faces east onto the quadrangle within the fort. This area, which is divided into four sections by paved roadways, is planted with grass and trees and contains playground equipment and a picnic table. Directly across the quadrangle and to the north and south, are three similar structures. On the rear or west side of the building is an areaway enclosed by a chain link fence, the sodded terreplein interrupted by the concreted vaulting of the west sallyport and the west curtain wall of the fort. Stone driveways to the north and south of the building lead to brick double garages.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings:

The following drawings are located in the Cartographic and Architectural Branch of the National Archives in Record Group 77, Maps and Plans of the Office of the Chief of Engineers.

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Plan of Fort Columbus, Governor's Island, New York, Divided Into Two Sections. The First Showing the Original Work. The Second Exhibiting the Repairs and Alterations Proposed to be Adopted in Completing the Authorized Repairs. Maj. R. E. DeRussey. October 17, 1832. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 8.

Plan of Fort Columbus Showing Present Alterations in Barracks and Terreplein, April 24, 1839. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 10.

Sheet No. 9, Details of Barracks, Fort Columbus, Governors Island. Capt. J. G. Barnard. December 1839. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 23. Illustrates the facades and floor plans of the recently constructed buildings.

Proposed Alterations to the Barracks and Officers' Quarters within Fort Columbus, 1844. Filed with Colonel James Bankhead to Brigadier General R. Jones, November 5, 1844. Box 98, Colonel James Bankhead, Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1915, Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives. The proposed alterations were not done at the time.

Officers Quarters in Fort Columbus with Proposed Alterations, 1855. Fortification File, Fort Columbus, Drawer 37, sheet 40. Alterations were probably completed shortly after the plans were submitted.

Drawings dated 1936-1937, which document the changes made to the building by the WPA include floor plans and electrical, plumbing and heating plans, are on file at the U.S. Coast Guard, Support Center, New York, Facilities Engineering Office on Governors Island.

B. Early Views:

Possible View of Front Side, 1864. 165-C-1094A, Record Group 165, Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Still Picture Branch, National Archives.

View of Front Side, March 18, 1931. U.S. Coast Guard, Support Center, New York, Special Services Office on Governors Island.

View of Front Side, ca. 1895-ca. 1904. 92-F-15-5, Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, Still Picture Branch, National Archives.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

The following sources are located in Record Group 92, Office of the Quartermaster General, Consolidated Correspondence File, 1794-1915, Navy and Old Army Branch, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Major Henry Stanton to Brigadier General Thomas Jesup, March 18, 1827. Box 346, Governors Island. Describes condition of original barracks buildings within the fort.

Proceedings of a Board of Officers convened on the first day of April Eighteen hundred and thirty-nine. Box 191, Fort Columbus. Notes that the barracks buildings within the fort had recently been completed and discusses what the Board considered to be the poor design of the buildings.

Colonel James Bankhead to Brigadier General R. Jones, November 5, 1844. Box 98, Colonel James Bankhead. Discusses problems with the plans and proposes alterations to make the buildings more functional. A drawing showing the proposed changes is filed with the letter.

Inspection report made on public Buildings, Officers and Troop Quarters at Fort Columbus New York Harbor on the 31st day of October 1863 by 1st Lieut. James L. Casey, 5th Infantry, Acting Assistant Quartermaster U.S. Army. Box 191, Fort Columbus. Lists number of rooms per floor in the buildings.

Colonel H. Whiting to General Thomas Jesup, January 28, 1850. Box 346, Governors Island. Discusses problems resulting from the nearly flat roof and recommends raising the pitch of the roof.

2. Secondary and published sources:

U.S. Surgeon General's Office. Governor's Island, Record of Medical History of the Post. Washington, D.C.: Medical Department, U.S. Army, May 14, 1868. Gives detailed description of the building and its use in 1868.

U.S. Surgeon General's Office. Circular No. 4, A Report on Barracks and Hospitals with Descriptions of Military Posts. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1870. Description of the building's interior, exterior and use.

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. A Report on the Hygiene of the United States
Army, with Descriptions of Military Posts. Washington, D.C.:
Government Printing Office, 1875.

American State Papers: Documents Legislative and Executive, of
the Congress of the United States. Class V, Military Affairs.
vol. 5. Washington, D.C.: Gales and Seaton, 1860. Briefly
describes the progress of construction during the 1830s.

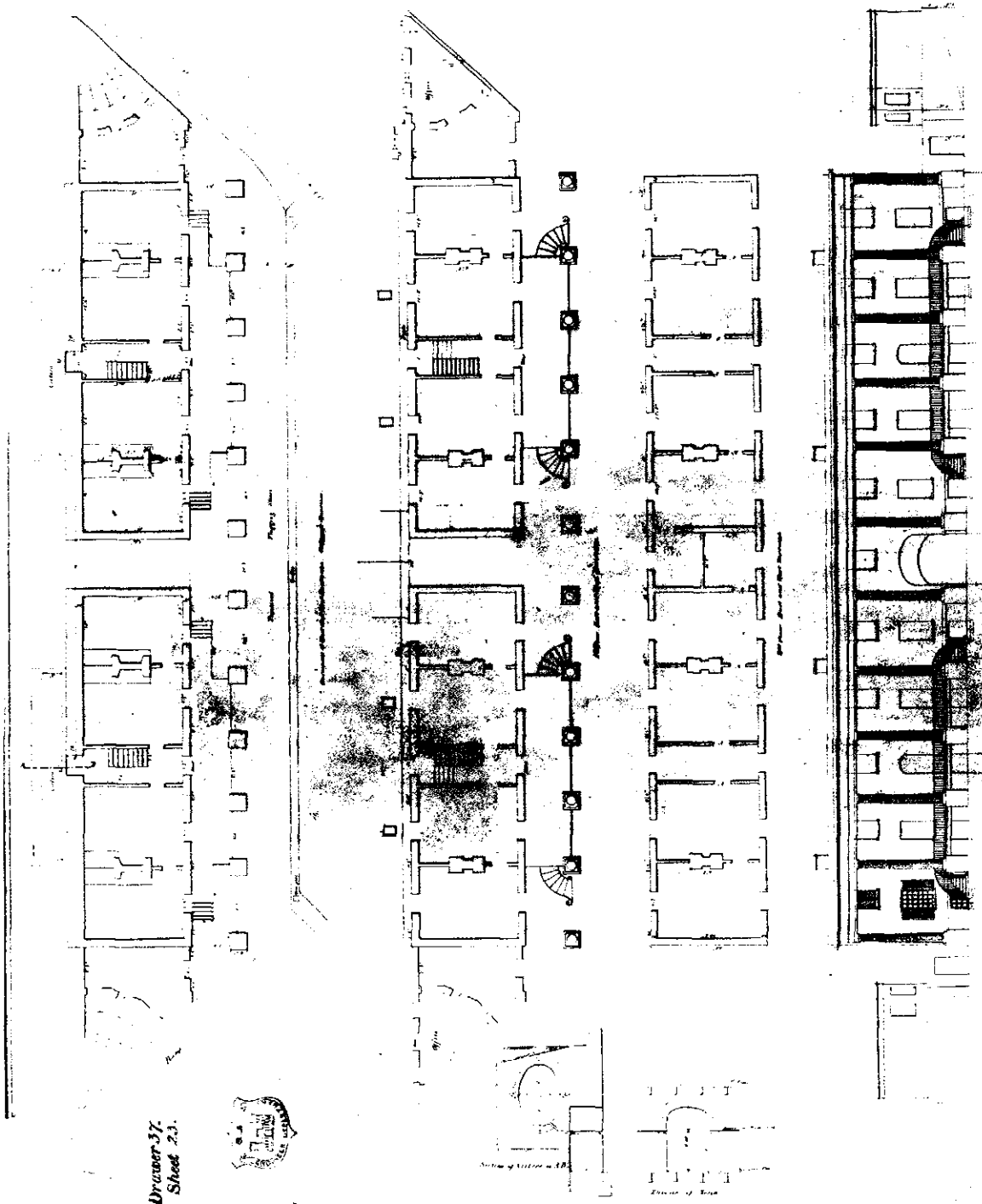
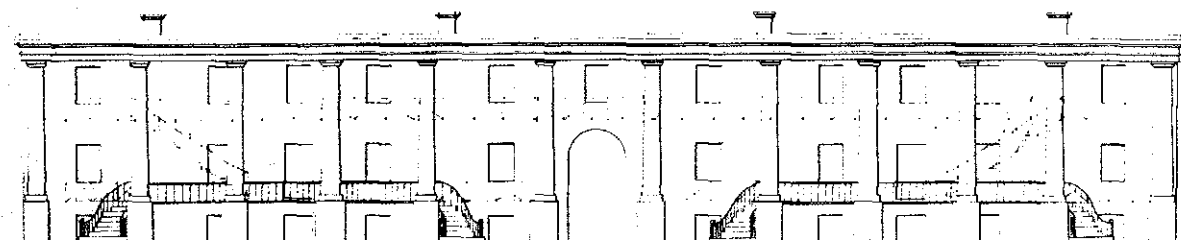


Plate 1

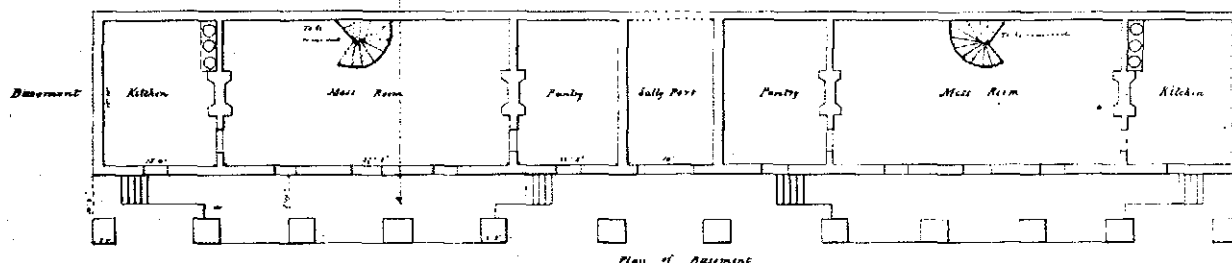
Photocopy of Drawing of Barracks, Fort Jay, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 37, sheet 23
Details for Officer's and Soldier's Quarters
Drawn by Captain J.G. Barnard, December 1839

2

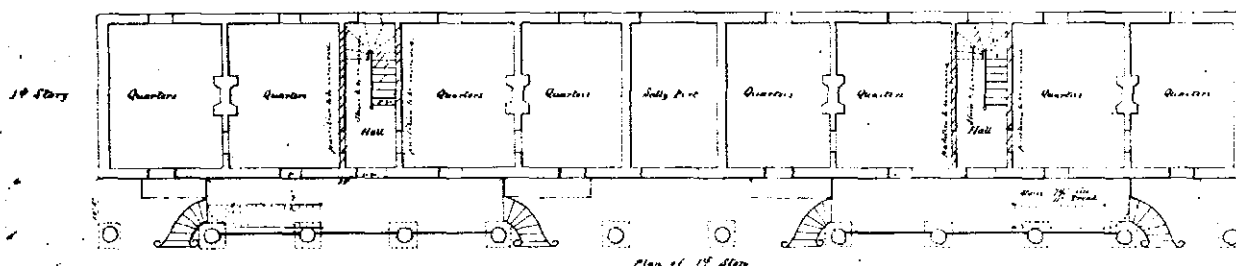
Proposed alteration in SOLDIERS QUARTERS in Fort Columbus Governors Island NY.



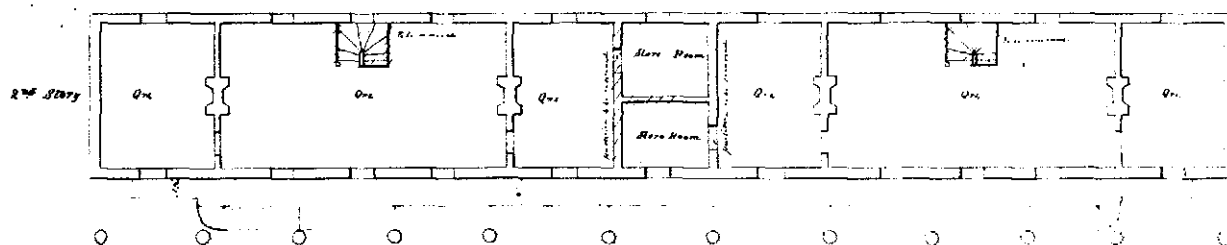
Front Elevation



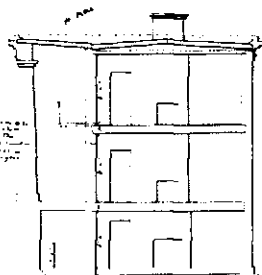
Plan of Basement



Plan of 1st Story



Notes, as explained drawing
 Approved by the Chief Engineer and Architect and April 1855 (D.H.M.)
 J.B. McPherson
 Architect
 Proposed Alteration
 The alterations proposed by the Chief Engineer and Architect
 and approved by the Chief Engineer and Architect
 J.B. McPherson
 Architect



Section on A. B.

Scale of 1/2 inch to one foot

N.B. The plan shows the present arrangement
 The red lines show the proposed alterations

July 2nd May 29 1855
 And a Major General at Fort Mifflin with him
 the following alterations
 120 yards from the Fort Mifflin July 16 1855

Plate 3

Photocopy of Drawings of Soldier's Quarters, Fort Columbus, New York
 National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
 Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 37, sheet 39
 Proposed Alteration in Soldiers Quarters in Fort Columbus
 Drawn by J.B. McPherson, April 1855

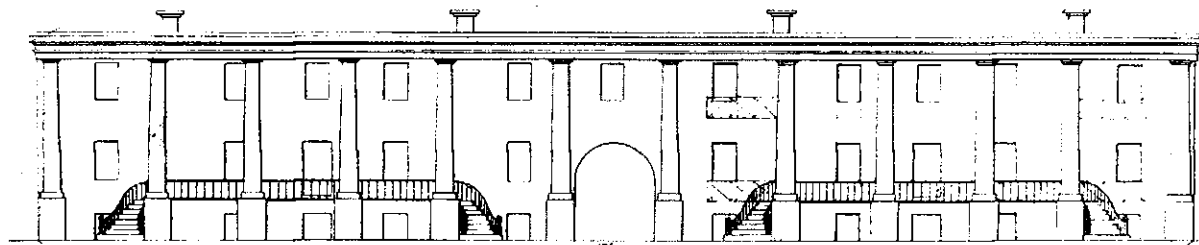
/ OFFICERS QUARTERS

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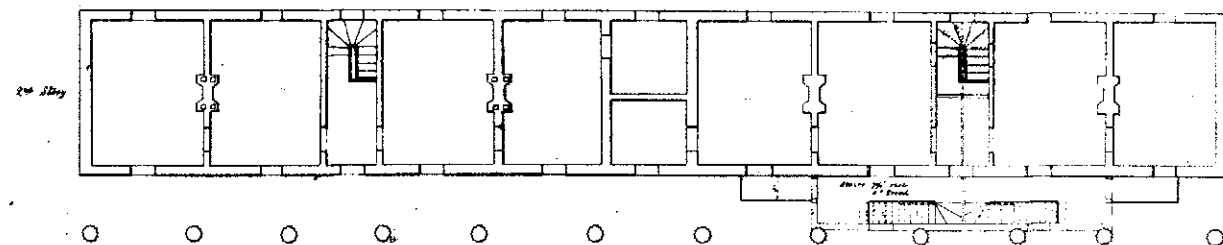
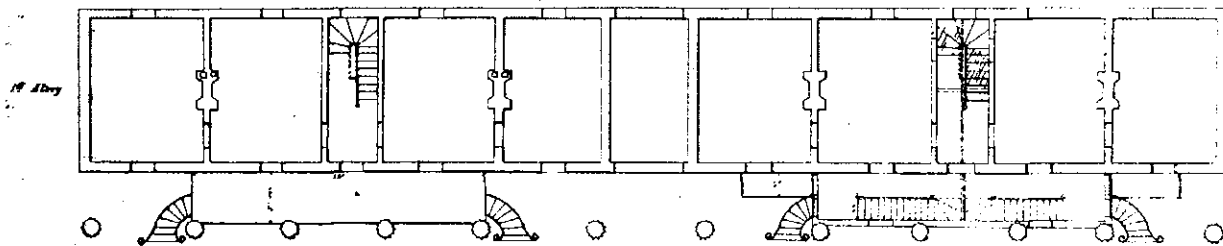
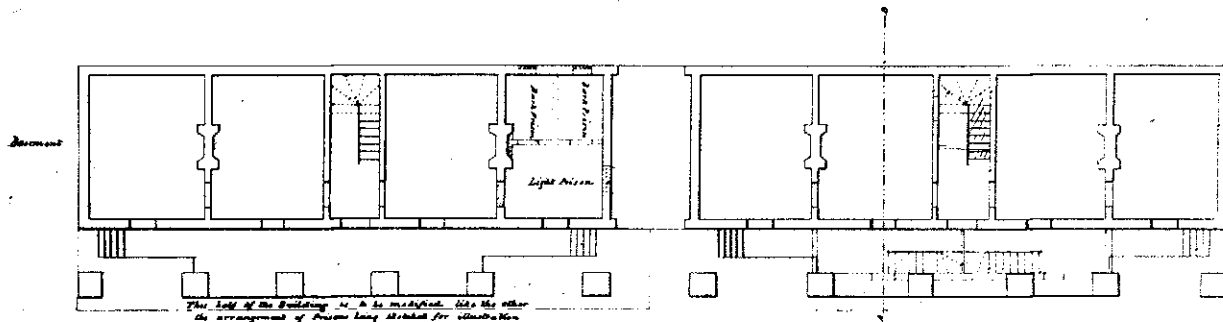
B

in Fort Columbus Governor's Island N.Y.

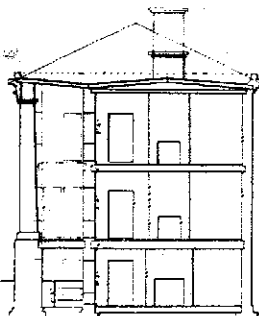
with proposed alterations



Front Elevation



Sketch of the original
 Presented to the Chief Engineer with my letter of the 2nd April 1855 (B. 1855)
 from New York B. 1855
 Archd. John Field,
 Major of Engineers
 Engineer Department
 Received April 4, 1855
 The alterations offered from actual measurement
 and drawn by
 A. B. McPherson
 Lieut. Colonel of Engs.
 New York
 March 1855



Section on A. B.

Scale of 1/4" to the Foot

N.B. The black lines indicate the present arrangement
 The red lines the proposed alterations

Plate 4

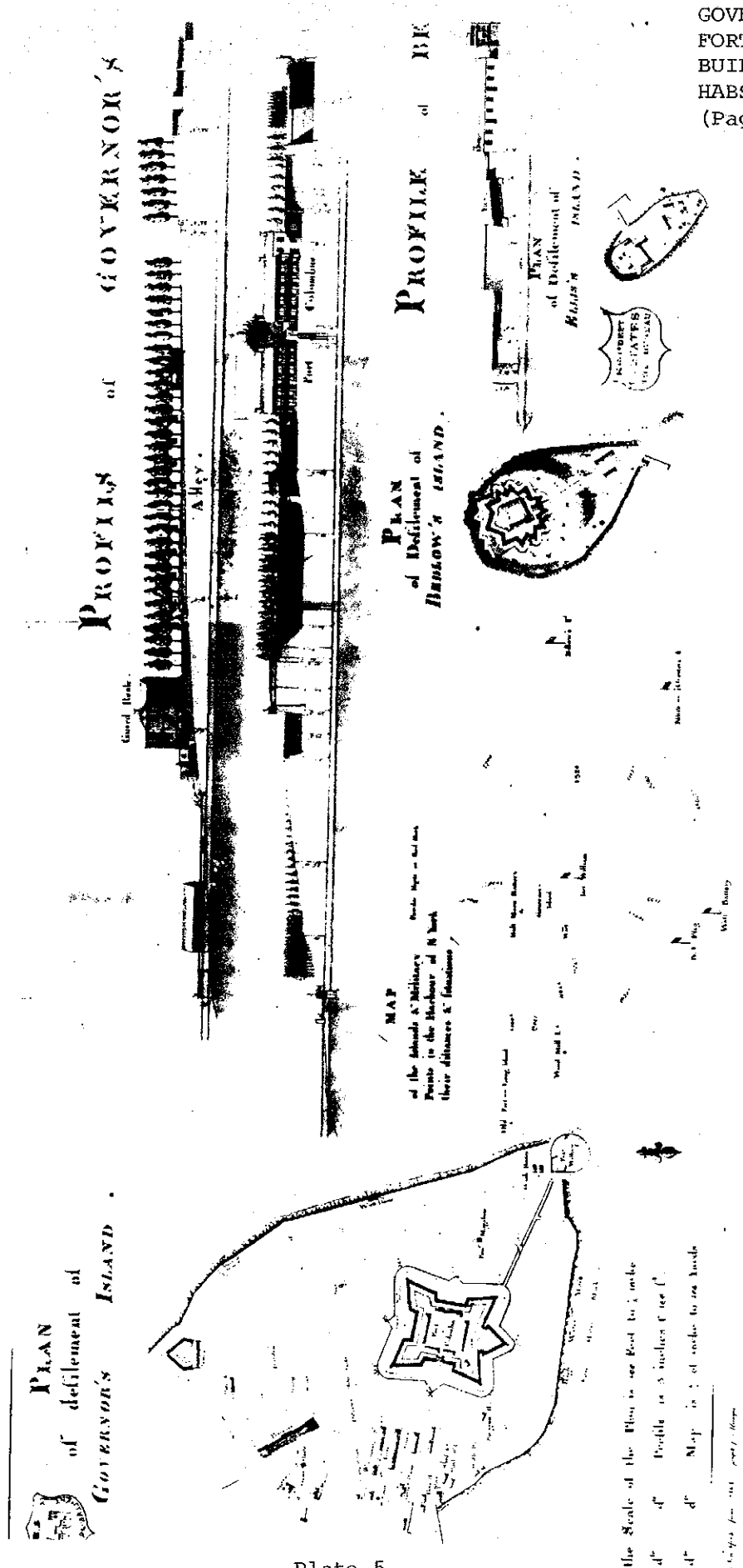
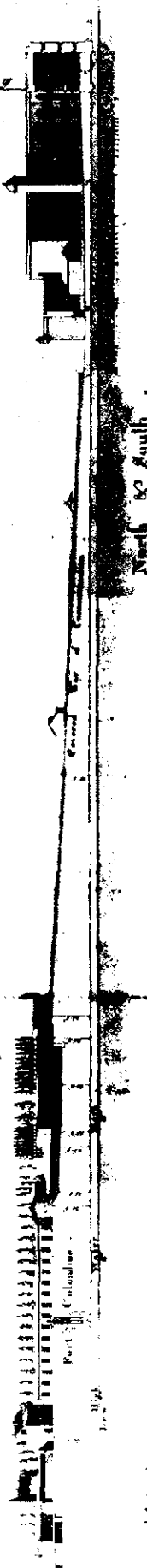


Plate 5

Photocopy of Map of Governors Island, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 36, sheet 20
Profiles of Governors Island, Bedlow's Island and Ellis Island
Drawn by Joseph L. Mangin, June 1813

ELLIS ISLAND drawn according to a direction East and West

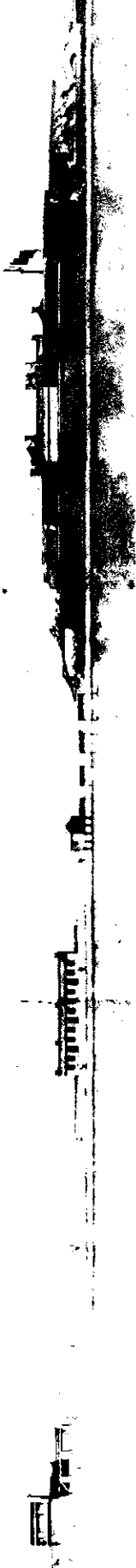


North & South



Battery

DELOW'S ISLAND drawn according to its length; also a view of its Fort and Battery



PROFILE of ELLIS'S ISLAND drawn according to its length; also a front view of its Battery



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Plate 6

Photocopy of Map of Governors Island, New York
National Archives, Architectural and Cartographic Branch
Record Group 77-Fortifications File, Drawer 36, sheet 20
Profiles of Governors Island, Bedlow's Island and Ellis Island
Drawn by Joseph L. Mangin, June 1813

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER) at the request of the United States Coast Guard, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, New York, who funded the project. The field work was accomplished during the summers of 1982 and 1983. The historic structures inventory, a National Historic Landmark District nomination and the documentation of five properties were completed in 1984. A three-volume report and inventory cards containing the results of the historic structures inventory have been transmitted to the Library of Congress as field records under HABS No. NY-5715. The National Historic Landmark District nomination was submitted and acted upon favorably by the National Park System Advisory Board in October of 1984.

Sally Kress Tompkins, Deputy Chief of HABS/HAER, was project manager. John Burns, AIA and S. Allen Chambers both of the HABS staff provided technical assistance and review; Jet Lowe, HAER staff photographer, completed the large format photography; Blanche Higgins, historian, and David Broderon of Cornell University completed the historic structures inventory during the summer of 1982; Barbara Hightower, historian, developed the HABS documentation during the summer of 1983; Karin Madison of the HABS/HAER staff assisted in the production of the report and provided photographic control. Paige George of the University of Virginia did the Governors Island map and title sheet. Jay Silberman, Environmental Specialist, District Planning Office, Third Coast Guard District, Governors Island, served as manager and coordinator of the project for the U.S. Coast Guard.